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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VANCOUVER 0967

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: NATIONAL UNITY AND CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM:
VANCOUVER PERSPECTIVE

1. SUMMARY. MANY BRITISH COLUMBIANS BELIEVE THAT NATIONAL UNITY AND CANADIAN SOVEREIGNTY ARE DIRECTLY LINKED, THAT IF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WILL QUIT CANADA, QUEBEC WILL NOT AND NATIONAL UNITY WILL BE PRESERVED. GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS ARE SEEN AS PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY BUT THEY ARE IN FOR TOUGH SLEDDING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA. END SUMMARY.

2. IT IS HARD TO CONCEIVE OF THE BREAKUP OF THIS HUGE AND MAGNIFICENT COUNTRY, CANADA, BUT CANADIANS HERE SPEAK OPENLY OF THE POSSIBILITY--EVEN THE LIKELIHOOD. THE LARGE MAJORITY BELIEVE IT WILL NOT HAPPEN BUT NO ONE WILL SAY IT CANNOT. THERE IS PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF THE PROPOSITION QUEBEC CAN AND MIGHT THROUGH REFERENDUM(S) VOTE ITSELF OUT OF THE FEDERATION WHICH IN ITSELF IS ASTONISHING SINCE THERE IS NEITHER EXPLICIT LEGAL AUTHORITY NOR PRECEDENT FOR A PROVINCE TO SECEDE. A CASE COULD BE MADE FOR A CONTRARY VIEW BUT THERE IS NO ONE IN THE PROVINCIAL LEADERSHIP, GOVERNMENT OR BUSINESS,
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WHO IS DOING SO.

3. BRITISH COLUMBIANS' ACCEPTANCE OF THE IDEA THAT QUEBEC MAY SECEDE AND THAT THERE COULD BE A FURTHER FRACTURING OF THE FEDERATION SEEMS TO PASS ALL UNDERSTANDING. IS IT BECAUSE THEY ARE MORE DEMOCRATIC, MORE GENEROUSLY DISPOSED TO PERMIT DISSENTING PARTS OR

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PARTIES OF THE COUNTRY TO GO THEIR OWN WAY? OR IS IT
THAT THE HATE OF THINGS FRENCH IS SO GREAT THAT NON-
FRENCH CANADIANS ARE ONLY TOO READY TO SEE QUEBEC OPT
OUT, WHATEVER THE RISK. IT SEEMS TO BE SOMETHING ELSE.
4. FOR ALL THEIR PRIDE IN COUNTRY AND FOR ALL THEIR
PLASTERING OF THINGS CANADIAN WITH THE MAPLE LEAF,
BRITISH COLUMBIANS DO NOT HAVE THE "ONE NATION
INDIVISIBLE" KIND OF PATRIOTISM WE AMERICANS KNOW.
UNTIL ONE HAS HEARD IT AS OFTEN AS ONE LIVING HERE
DOES, IT TAKES ONE'S BREATH AWAY TO HEAR THEM DISCUSS
THE POSSIBILITY OF THE COUNTRY'S BREAKUP WITH THE POSSI-
BILITY, TOO, OF SOME OR ALL OF THE PROVINCES SEEKING
UNION WITH THE UNITED STATES. TO THEM SUCH TALK
DOESN'T SMACK OF ANTI-NATIONALISM. THEY LOVE THEIR
COUNTRY AND ARE PROUD OF IT. IT'S JUST THEIR ASSESSMENT
OF THE SITUATION.

5. WHY IS THIS SO? ONE REASON MAY BE THE STRONG
PROVINCIAL OREINTATION FOSTERED BY A HIGHLY DECENTRALIZED
DOMINION/PROVINCIAL RELATIONSHIP. BRITISH COLUMBIA IS
A RICH PROVINCE AND ITS CITIZENS HAVE CONFIDENCE THEY
COULD "GO IT ALONE" IF NECESSARY. ANOTHER MAY BE THAT
CANADIANS ADMIRE THINGS AMERICAN. THEY UNDERSTANDABLY
WORRY AND FRET ABOUT BEING "A MOUSE IN BED WITH AN
ELEPHANT" BUT THEY HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF BROTHERHOOD
WITH AMERICANS. AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO CANADIAN, AMERICAN
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WOULD NOT BE HARD TO TAKE AND MANY WOULD WELCOME IT.
THE PRINCIPAL CAUSE, HOWEVER, AS SEEN FROM VANCOUVER,
SEEMS TO BE THE CONSEQUENCE OF A WEAK SENSE OF
NATIONALITY. THE WEAK SENSE OF NATIONALITY SEEMS TO BE
IN LARGE MEASURE THE CONSEQUENCE OF CANADA'S LACKING AN
ESSENTIAL FOR NATIONALITY: INDEPENDENCE.

6. EVERY BRITISH COLUMBIA OWES ALLEGIANCE TO AN ENGLISH
QUEEN--NOT TO CANADA. CANADA'S CONSTITUTION, THE
BRITISH NORTH AMERICA ACT--WHICH MIGHT MORE ACCURATELY
BE LABELED A ROYAL CHARTER--IS BRITISH LAW. THE COUNTRY
IS IN THE HUMILIATING CONDITION OF HAVING TO GO TO THE
BRITISH PARLIAMENT TO LEGISLATE AMENDMENTS TO ITS
CONSTITUTION AND TO CERTAIN STATUTES. THIS SUBORDINATE
POSITION NOT ONLY HAS AN INCALCULABLE EFFECT ON THE
PUBLIC PSYCHE, IT PROMOTES A CONDITION WHEREIN PERSONS
AND ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVELY WORK AGAINST NATIONAL UNITY,
CONSCIOUSLY OR UNCONSCIOUSLY.

7. THIS CAN BE PERCEIVED WHEN BRITISH COLUMBIANS ARE
LOOKED AT ALONG ETHNIC LINES. ETHNIC GROUPINGS REMAIN
QUITE EVIDENT AND WILL TEND TO DO SO AS LONG AS THE CROWN

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CONNECTION BACKS THE PREDOMINANT GROUP, THE ENGLISH. AS A POLITICAL/CULTURAL FORCE, THE ENGLISH GROUP WOULD ALSO INCLUDE THOSE OF OTHER NATIONAL ORIGINS WHO ARE SUPPORTIVE OF THE IMPERIAL CONNECTION AND ENGLISH CULTURE FOR WHATEVER REASONS. THE FRENCH, THE SECOND MOST DOMINANT GROUP, SEE IN THE IMPERIAL CONNECTION THE CONTINUED DOMINATION OF THE ENGLISH AND A THREAT TO THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY. THE SMALLER ETHNIC GROUPS BY AND LARGE FALL IN WITH THE DOMINANT FOR THEY ARE

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NOT IN A POSITION TO OFFER CONTEST, NOR DO THEY HAVE REASON TO SUPPORT THE ETHNIC GROUP WHICH IS IN A NUMBER TWO POSITION.

8. IN BRITISH COLUMBIA COMPLACENCY PREVAILS. QUEBEC, IT IS SAID, WILL NOT WITHDRAW FROM THE CANADIAN FEDERATION. QUEBEC WILL KNOW WHAT IS BEST FOR HER AND WILL NOT OPT FOR INDEPENDENCE. AFTER ALL, QUEBEC FATTENS ON THE REST OF THE COUNTRY WITH THE WESTERN STATES IN PARTICULAR PAYING HEAVILY FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF FEDERATION WITH IT. THERE IS A LIMIT, HOWEVER, AND THAT LIMIT, THEY SAY, HAS JUST ABOUT BEEN REACHED. "IF QUEBECKERS WANT TO LEAVE, LET THEM."

9. THERE IS RATHER STARTLING CONSISTENCY IN THESE SENTIMENTS AT ALL LEVELS IN THE BODY POLITIC. ALTHOUGH BRITISH COLUMBIA IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE A BASTION OF ENGLISHNESS, VANCOUVER, THIS CAPITAL OF THE CANADIAN TROPICS, IS POPULATED BY CANADIANS FROM ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. THE ENGLISH GROUP MAY BE PARTICULARLY

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DEFENSIVE OF ITS PREDOMINANT POSITION BUT OTHERS SEE LITTLE REASON WHY THEY SHOULD BE FORCED TO ACCOMMODATE TO BOTH THE ENGLISH AND THE FRENCH REALITIES IN CANADA.
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10. AS SEEN FROM HERE, SUCCESS IN EFFORTS TO UNITE CANADIANS AND EXTIRPATE ETHNIC NATIONAL MOVEMENTS, ENGLISH OR FRENCH, CAN ONLY COME WHEN THE COUNTRY IS IN A POSITION FOR ALL ITS PEOPLE TO RALLY TOGETHER AND CREATE A NATIONAL UNIQUENESS, BRINGING AN END TO A CONDITION OF ETHNOCENTRISM WHERE THE CARDS ARE STACKED TO FAVOR ONE GROUP. THIS CAN COME ONLY WITH CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS PERMITTING AND PROMOTING A CANADA THAT IS "OF...BY...FOR" CANADIANS, A CANADA THAT IS SOVEREIGN.

11. A MOST HEARTENING DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS THIS END WAS THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ITS INTENTION TO SEEK QUITE FAR-REACHING CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. MOST INTRIGUING IS THE PROPOSAL THAT THE GOVERNOR GENERAL HAVE AN INDEPENDENT STATUS AND NOT BE SIMPLY THE QUEEN'S REPRESENTATIVE IN CANADA. MANY SEE IN THIS THE INTENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS GOVERNMENT TO JETTISON BRITISH SOVEREIGNTY. FIRST SIGNS INDICATE THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS ARE IN FOR A TOUGH SLEDDING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE OLDER SEGMENTS OF THE BRITISH COLUMBIA POPULATION, FOR THE MONARCHY. DIMINUTION OF THE QUEEN'S ROLE AS CONTEMPLATED IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT BILL, INTRODUCED IN PARLIAMENT LAST MONTH, WILL RUN INTO OPPOSITION HERE.

12. THERE IS ALSO CONSIDERABLE OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED HOUSE OF THE FEDERATION, TO CHANGES IN THE SUPREME COURT WHICH ARE SEEN AS STRENGTHENING THE POSITION OF QUEBEC, AND TO THE NEW LANGUAGE PROVISIONS WHICH ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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ALSO SEEN AS STRENGTHENING THE POSITION OF THE FRENCH AT CONSIDERABLE FINANCIAL COST AND INCONVENEINCE TO THE PROVINCES.

13. AS SEEN FROM VANCOUVER, NATIONAL UNITY WOULD BE PROMOTED BY CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS WHICH, AS THE

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GOVERNMENT INTENDS, WOULD SAFEGUARD THE INTERESTS OF
MINORITY GROUPS AND PROMOTE CANADIAN INDEPENDENCE.
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, MEMBERS OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION
AND MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES--SOME OF THEM SUPPORTERS OF
THE MONARCHY--HAVE STATED TO ME THEIR BELIEF THAT THE
QUEBEC SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT WOULD COME TO AN END
("THERE WOULD BE NO REASON FOR IT") IF THERE WERE AN
END TO BRITISH SOVEREIGNTY. THE CHANGING COMPOSITION
AND CHARACTER OF THE CANADIAN POPULATION WILL EVENTUALLY
LEAD CANADA TO SEVER THE IMPERIAL CONNECTION FOR THE
SAME REASONS OTHER COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES HAVE DONE SO.
OF 36 COMMONWEALTH MEMBERS ONLY 10 OTHER THAN BRITAIN
REMAIN WHO RECOGNIZE THE BRITISH MONARCHY AS SOVEREIGN
AND 8 OF THESE ARE MINI-ISLAND STATES, THE OTHER TWO
BEING CANADA AND AUSTRALIA. THE QUESTION IS, HOW LONG
CAN CANADA WAIT?
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